

13. RECENT SIGHTINGS OF THE SANDWICH TERN (*STERNA SANDVICENSIS*), WITH COMMENTS ON ITS STATUS IN GUJARAT

(With a text-figure)

After Dharmakumarsinhji (1958) first recorded a Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* in its winter plumage in May 1958, near Veraval on the west coast of Gujarat, there were no records of the bird from Indian waters until an individual ringed in Russia was recovered from Kerala in March 1976 (Ambedkar 1985). Lal Mohan (1986) reports on the collection of three birds, one from Rameshwaram island, Tamil Nadu, in September 1983 and two others from Mandapam, also in Tamil Nadu, in June 1983 and November 1983 respectively. From Sri Lanka, a single ring recovery has been recorded (Ali and Ripley 1983). This tern is, however, known to

be a common winter visitor to coastal Pakistan (Ali and Ripley 1983).

The Sandwich Tern is slightly larger than the Gullbilled Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*, sleek in build, with a yellow tipped slender black bill that is visible at a close range only. In India, a majority of these birds have been seen in their winter plumage, which consists of a black nuchal tuft, white crown streaked with black, grey wings and mantle, a white underside and forked tail. When viewed casually, the Sandwich Tern can be mistaken for the Gullbilled Tern, and Ambedkar (1985) suggests this as a possible reason for the lack of additional records from India.

TABLE 1

A SUMMARY OF THE SIGHTINGS OF THE SANDWICH TERN IN GUJARAT

Location no. <sup>1</sup> and place	Date	Habitat type	No. of birds	Observer <sup>2</sup>
1. New Port, Jamnagar	1.ii.1986	tidal creek	1	T.M.
2. Pirotan	-.xii.84	island	1	S.K. and L.K. (pers. comm.)
3. Ashapura	18.vii.84	saltpan	1	S.T. and T.M.
4. Man merodi	5.i.87	island	2	S.K., L.K. and T.M.
5. Bet Dwarka	26.iii.86	island	4	R.P. and T.M.
6. Okha	15.x.84	seacoast	3	S.K. and L.K. (pers. comm.)
7. Veraval	19.v.58	mouth of river	1	Dharmakumarsinhji (1958)
8. Vanakbara <sup>3</sup>	26.i.87	tidal creek	52	A.S. and T.M.
9. Diu <sup>3</sup>	26.i.87	tidal creek	63	A.S. and T.M.
	6.vi.86	tidal creek	6	N.J. and T.M.
10. Nayabunder	25.i.87	seacoast	43	A.S. and T.M.
11. Simor <sup>3</sup>	25.i.87	seacoast	16	A.S. and T.M.

<sup>1</sup> The locations are designated by the same numbers as in Figure 1.

<sup>2</sup> A.S. — Anil Shetgaonkar, L.K. — Lavkumar Khacher, N.J. — Narendrasinh Jhala, R.P. — Rishad Pravez, S.K. — Shivraj Kumar Khacher, T.M. — Taej Mundkur.

<sup>3</sup> These locations are in Diu district, which is under the jurisdiction of the Union territory of Goa, Daman and Diu.

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES.

In the last few years, the Sandwich Tern has been sighted in a number of places on the coast of Gujarat (Table 1 and Figure 1). The most recent sightings were made on an

approximately 30 km coastline, covered on 25 and 26 January 1987 (Table 1), when flocks of upto 63 birds were observed with other birds, namely Gullbilled Tern, Caspian Tern

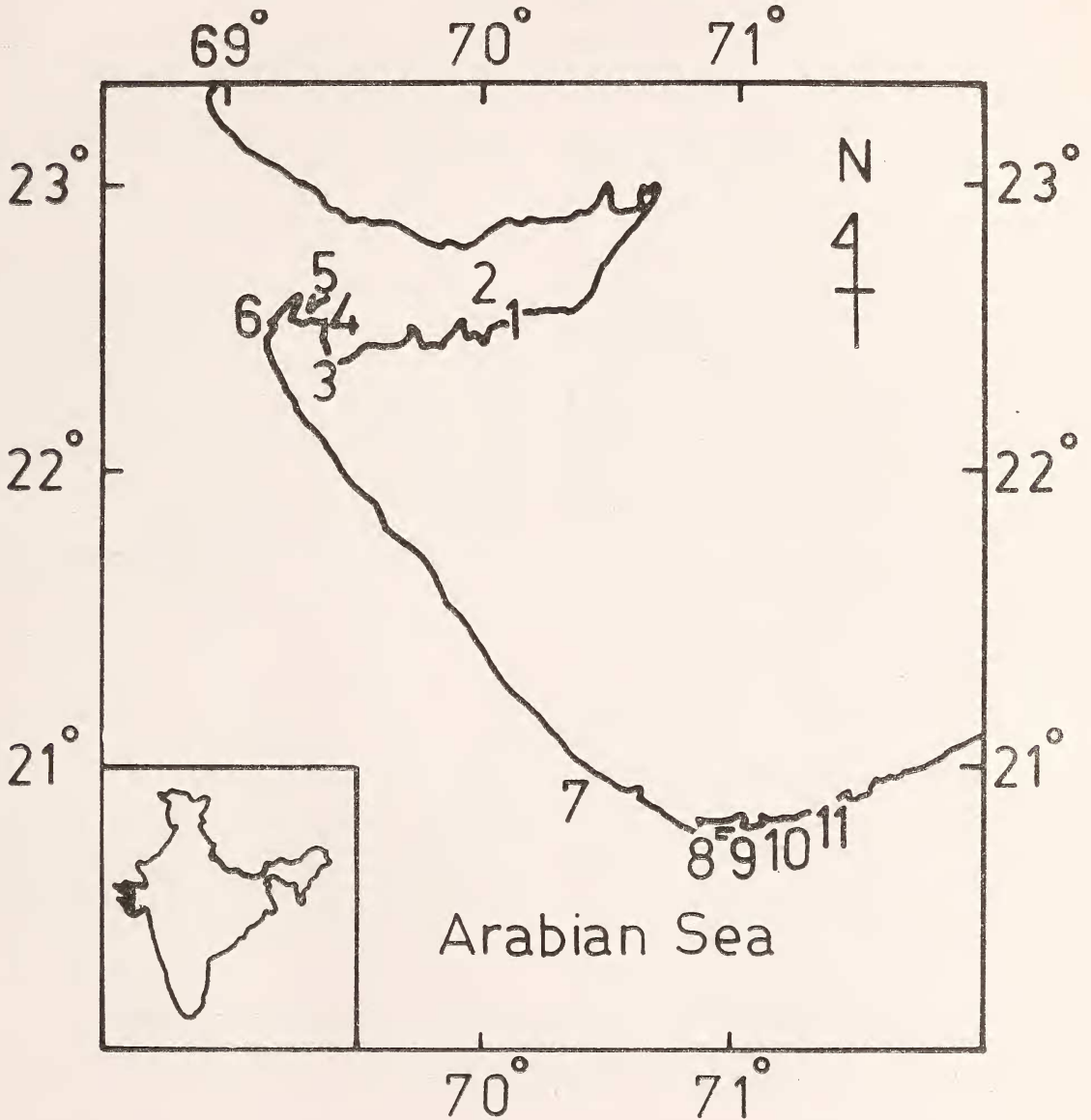


Fig. 1. Sight records of the Sandwich Tern in the study area in Gujarat. Locations are designated by location numbers as explained in Table 1. (Inset gives the map of India with the study area shaded in black).

*Hydroprogne caspia*, Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*, Little Tern *Sterna albigrons*, Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*, Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus* and Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, resting on sand bars and rocks exposed during the low tides. One of the Sandwich Terns had an aluminium ring on its right tarsus.

The Sandwich Terns observed between May and July (Table 1) were probably sub-adults overwintering here. It is known for the European nesting population (Moller 1981) that many first year, some second year and third year birds spend the summer in their winter quarters in Africa, the birds maturing and breeding first only at the age of four years.

At Diu, when we observed the birds in summer, they were among a few thousand other terns, namely, Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, a majority of which were juveniles and some adults in winter plumage, Caspian

Tern, Whiskered Tern and Gullbilled Tern in winter plumage and Little Tern in summer plumage. This observation indicates that the Diu creek may be important for overwintering Laridae.

Repeated sighting of the Sandwich Tern in Gujarat strengthens the view that the bird is a more frequent visitor along the coast of western India than what the earlier scant records indicate.

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#### 14. A NOTE ON THE FIRST DISCOVERY OF THE NEST AND EGGS OF THE ASHY-HEADED BABBLER *GARRULAX CINEREIFRONS*, AN ENDEMIC SPECIES OF SRI LANKA, IN 1984

According to A HISTORY OF THE BIRDS OF CEYLON Legge (1880), *Garrulax cinereifrons* was first discovered by Dr. Kelaart in

1852, and it is recorded in "Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Ceylon (Sri Lanka)", Phillips (1978) that its breeding was then still un-